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ITALY'S ACTIVE SUMMER

by George Popoff

There has been no lazy "summer feeling" in Italy this year. In spite of the heat wave, the Italian politicians and parliamentarians have been extremely busy during the whole month of July. A great number of important events -- important also for the rest of the Western world and especially for the U.S.A. -- took place.

The Italian Parliament ratified the Atlantic Pact by a large majority, and thus definitely confirmed the close collaboration of Italy with the Western Powers. During the visit here of Mr. John W. Snyder, your Secretary of the Treasury, various important questions of Italy's economy and finance were discussed, and the case was made for American assistance in meeting urgent Italian needs. The big Agrarian Reform received its final touches. Finally the drastic Decree of the Vatican, excommunicating Catholic Communists, was issued and has already served to clarify the hitherto confused inner situation in this matter. These developments have somewhat calmed the nervousness of Italy as to the strained situation on her Eastern frontiers.

The vast project of Agrarian Reform as planned by Premier de Gasperi and his Minister for Agriculture, Signor Segni, has now been made public in all its details. This envisages an enormous redistribution in the ownership of land, to the extent of no less than 1.5 million acres. The project will create from 250,000 to 300,000 new small landholders and is designed to give work to about 700,000 at present unemployed agricultural laborers.

Big landowners will be gradually expropriated, leaving to each as a maximum no more than 1,000 acres. The minimum of land to be allotted to the new small landholders is fixed at 30 acres each. Those expropriated will be compensated according to a scale fixed by the Government. The new landholders will have to pay for their allotments, but on easy terms and over a period of ten years. Execution of the whole scheme will cost the Italian State about 400 billion lire, and will certainly involve a great deal of work and sacrifice. But it promises to be worth while.

Important though the Agrarian Reform is, this alone certainly cannot resolve the main economic and social problems and difficulties of post-war Italy. Present agrarian conditions in some sections (by no means all) of Italy are in urgent need of reform. But Italy is not

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Czarist Russia. It is not a country -- as many American visitors seem to think -- of "a few big landowners and a starving mass of landless laborers". Redistribution of land in certain particularly backward parts of the country will not of itself solve the chronic social troubles of Italy. This country is suffering less from a "shortage of land", than from an overabundance of population and a lack of markets.

II

The surplus Italian population must again be allowed to emigrate and settle overseas, preferably, Italians think, in the countries of North and South America. And markets must be found for the products of Italian industry and labor. These are the main remedies for Italy's present-day difficulties. They were, we hear, amply discussed during Mr. Snyder's recent visit to Rome. As result of these talks there is increased hope that fundamental Italian problems will be recognized as such in Washington and met there with due comprehension. The more so -- it is emphasized here -- since from an improvement in Italy's economic and social situation, the United States, too, will profit in the long run. Only an Italy that sells goods to America, will in future be able to buy goods from America.

Greater facilities in regard to emigration and exports would furthermore effectively combat the Communist danger, which has by no means disappeared in Italy. Recent municipal elections have shown that the decline of Communist votes in Italy continues. But the Communist Party is really very little affected by the loss of half a million or more floating votes. This subversive organization is not a normal political party. Votes mean far less to the Communists than the perfection of their revolutionary organization. And that organization is being constantly improved and tightened.

In view of the improved political situation in Western Europe, the Communists in Italy have changed their methods. But these new methods are more dangerous than the old ones. Vigilance cannot therefore be relaxed even for a moment. And nobody understands this necessity better than the leaders of the Catholic Church.

Some foreign observers here considered the recent Vatican Decree, excommunicating the Catholic Communists and their collaborators, as "premature". It was argued that this "atomic bomb of the Church" ought to have been saved for a more important and decisive moment. But those who are in the know realize the dangerous progress which the collaboration of a certain part of the Catholic clergy with the parties of the

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extreme Left has already made in many countries, including Italy. So the well-informed think that the Decree came at the right moment. The creation of State controlled "Catholic Action" organizations in Czechoslovakia certainly speeded up the matter.

In Italy most members of the Communist Party are at heart faithful Catholics and always wear, together with the Red party ticket, a small cross or an image of the Virgin. And in this country the Decree of the Church will, therefore, most certainly have the effect of further decreasing the dwindling number of active Communists and collaborators.

III

In the matter of foreign politics the chief Italian preoccupation -- apart from the colonial problem -- remains the fate of Trieste.

Tito's decision to introduce Yugoslav currency into Zone B of the Free State of Trieste has greatly alarmed the Italians, and has somewhat obscured more fundamental aspects of the Adriatic problem. Spokesmen of the Italian Government and press are of the opinion that Tito, in his present situation, has "no choice between the East and the West". He must, they argue, decide for the West. Consequently, to bring Tito over to the Western side, there is no need for the West to make any further concessions and in particular "no need for Italy to pay the price" for a rapprochement with Yugoslavia.

This Italian argument seems logical at first glance. But it overlooks the fact that in this sector of southeastern Europe a far greater problem than simply getting Tito over to the Western side is currently involved. There is also the general question of blocking Russian Communism off from access to the Eastern Mediterranean. Via Yugoslavia and Greece the Kremlin cannot -- it is true -- any longer penetrate into that sea. But the Soviet still has a strong foothold in Albania and is now pumping into Albania as much political influence and economic and military aid as possible. As a result the Western Powers are watching developments in Albania with particular attention. Thus this small Balkan country, which in the past has often played a role out of all proportion to its size, again achieves importance.

Indeed it is by no means impossible that Albania may soon be in the news even more than Yugoslavia. If by some other "Tito miracle" the Albanian people could liberate themselves from their present tyrants, the shores of the Adriatic Sea could be considered as definitely liberated from the pressures of Eastern Communism. This certainly would be an achievement, of immediate benefit to Italy.

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IV

The conclusions from this brief survey of recent Italian developments are obvious. Although the outlook for domestic as well as foreign problems has of late noticeably improved, the government of Premier de Gasperi has no reason whatsoever to relax either its efforts or its vigilance. This warning cannot be overemphasized, the less so because in Italy now -- as in other Western European countries -- the popular longing for "quiet and peace" has developed a general mood of appeasement. This state of mind is based on the assumption that during the recent international discussions "Russia has given in", and that the peoples of the Eastern European countries, if given plenty of goods and raw materials, will be gradually "won over for Democracy".

All this is, of course, a fatal illusion. The peoples of the countries of Eastern Europe cannot be "won over for democracy" with economic help, for the simple reason that the great majority of them are already convinced anti-Communists. The pumping of Western goods into the Eastern countries can therefore to some extent lessen the dissatisfaction of those peoples with the dictatorial regimes in their countries, and may thus benefit not the oppressed but rather their Communist oppressors. Likewise it is a dangerous illusion to think that the creation of some sort of a "dam" or "barrier" across Europe can stem the advancing flood of Communism. The red flood is not confined to the countries behind the Iron Curtain. It broke through the barrier of any conceivable Maginot Line and penetrated deep into the Western countries long before the desirability of a "dam" was even generally realized.

Not by economic aid, nor by erection of military "barriers", can the Eastern monster, which today threatens the "still free" peoples of the Western world, be conquered. The responsible men of Italy, a country dangerously near to the Iron Curtain, understand this. They know that security can only be achieved by keeping the monster of Russian Bolshevism under constant surveillance, by cutting down its sources of nourishment, by preventing, as far as possible, its rearming. It would be fatal to give way to the yearning for "quiet and peace" while the enemy labors incessantly at destruction.

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Not Merely Gossip *A Supplement to* Human Events Vol. 6, No. 31

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By Frank C. Hanighen August 3, 1949

SPELLMAN: Behind the Cardinal Spellman-Mrs. Roosevelt controversy, there have been some things which the press overlooked, or refrained from mentioning. For instance, the assumption that the Catholic Church is solidly behind Federal-aid-to-education, provided the parochial schools receive benefits, is incorrect. It is known that within the hierarchy there has been a profound difference of opinion. Roughly speaking, the eastern Bishops have preferred no federal aid at all, for fear of encroachment by the State. And generally western Bishops have wanted Federal aid because the parochial school system in their dioceses has been weak and in need of funds. Cardinal Spellman has been of the eastern school of thought. In some Catholic circles, it is believed that the New York prelate moved publicly into the education controversy, knowing full well that his intervention would help to kill the legislation during this session of Congress.

A secondary motive was probably to diminish Mrs. Roosevelt's prestige with the Catholic population, particularly in the urban industrial areas. It is thought that the Cardinal wished to warn many urban Catholic Labor leaders and politicians that they have not been sufficiently careful in their associations; and to bolster the courage of those who have been battling Left Wing elements in unions and the Democratic Party. For instance, in some parts of the East, old-line Democratic politicos, usually Irish Catholic, have been locked in a bitter internecine struggle with the followers of "Americans for Democratic Action", Mrs. Roosevelt's faction in the Party. The Cardinal sought to assist these conservative politicos.

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MRS. ROOSEVELT: Westbrook Pegler charged the other day that Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt is frequently shielded from publicity about her fellow traveller activities and asserted that Cardinal Spellman was right to level his finger at her in his recent statement. In the past few days, we have noted what appears to be an instance of this "protection". The highly interesting report of the House Un-American Activities Committee, entitled The American Slav Congress, contains a description of a Communist front called the "American Committee for Yugoslav Relief". This organization was, says the report, marked by "the cynical ruthlessness and hypocrisy of those responsible for the management of the organization who turned their harrowing appeals for relief on and off like a spigot determined primarily by the exigencies of Communist international policy". One of its exploits was to put the blame on the U. S. Government for the shooting down of American planes by Tito's fliers in August, 1946. Another was to consign, under the guise of relief, a shipment of radar and radar parts to Yugoslavia, in 1947. In 1948, the Department of Justice declared the body subversive. Its demise was significant; as soon as Stalin broke with Tito, the directors dissolved the organization.

Now one of the successes registered by this Slav body was to corral a number of important Americans to act as sponsors. The House Un-American Committee report prints an exhibit, with a long list of sponsors containing a number of prominent names, and some of these persons were undoubtedly "innocents". The exhibit which purports to be a reprint of the Committee's letterhead does not bear the name of Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. Yet letterheads of this committee that came across our desk listed Mrs. Roosevelt as "Honorary Chairman", and this fact was the subject of no little comment in the New York World Telegram in 1946. How did it happen that the otherwise careful House report failed to list Mrs. Roosevelt's name in connection with this subversive organization?

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CLARK: The elevation of Mr. Tom Clark to the Court does little to enhance the standing of that body. Few lawyers would deny that there are dozens of jurists on the bench today who would come to the Supreme Court better prepared to serve than Clark. However, we should report that Capitol Hill is inclined to approve the selection, on the ground that Mr. Clark is likely to side with those justices who oppose "legislation by the Court" -- meaning such decisions as the cement (or basing-point) case. According to this view, Clark will be more often found aligned with Jackson and Frankfurter than with Black and Douglas.

The fact that the President did not replace the Catholic Frank Murphy with another of the same faith has aroused much comment. Many believe that the President had been prepared to choose the Catholic Senator O'Mahoney and changed his mind because of his anger at Cardinal Spellman. In any case, Mr. Truman took a sound position in saying that he would make no choice on the basis of race or religion; and we presume the President would take the same stand should Justice Frankfurter resign and a silly clamor arise for appointment of another Jew to replace him. The Court has suffered too much already from political appointments. Though supposed to be non-partisan it is currently composed of eight loyal Democrats, all New Deal or Fair Deal appointees, and a lone Republican.

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DISMANTLING: It would not be surprising if Congressional discontent with the dismantling of German plants would soon again be in the headlines. There are reports that in committee the amendment to ECA requiring a review of the whole dismantling situation received backing from such a notable Administration wheelhorse as Senator O'Mahoney. Meanwhile, more members realize that this destructive policy is still going on, despite Administration attempts to give the contrary impression. Congresswoman St. George (N.Y.) voiced a rising protest in a speech to the House on July 25 when she said: "Evidence which I have been able to collect in the past two weeks indicates that, since April 13, dismantling has more and more boldly taken the form of outright scrapping of plants. In British military government circles, the subterfuge that the dismantlings apply only to war plants or to the elimination of excess capacity is apparently rapidly being abandoned. Since the Washington agreement, several incautious statements have been made by officials in the British zone, to the effect that the dismantlings will have a salutary effect in Great Britain, through eliminating the most dangerous of German competition."

The real scope of destruction of German productive capacity is far greater than the figures show, the Congresswoman points out: "In some of the most important steel mills, the central steelmaking plants -- the heart of the whole plant -- and/or plate rolling mills, steel foundries, and so forth, are being dismantled, leaving only the blast furnaces intact at one end of a once-rationalized production process, and processing departments at the other. The use of what has been left appears to be about as great as that of a man's head and his legs, after his torso has been cut off." Mrs. St. George concludes: "Mr. Speaker, all this adds up to one thing: That if Germany is to be turned into a goat pasture so that England can sell her high-priced goods, the American taxpayer will continue to support the German population on a starvation diet, for which they will incur nothing but hatred."

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KELLEMS: A climax has come in the Olympian struggle between Secretary of the Treasury Snyder and Miss Vivien Kellems, Connecticut manufacturer. Miss Kellems refused to withhold taxes from her employees and Snyder naturally objects. A year or so

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ago, Miss Kellems noted an interesting fact: her employees did not realize that they were actually paying taxes, although she had regularly been withholding the payments from their weekly wages. The Connecticut lady believes firmly -- and she can be adamant when she makes up her mind -- that it would be a good thing for the country if every wage earner were conscious of the fact that he or she is paying an income tax. Furthermore, Miss Kellems has developed some doubts that Secretary Snyder is on firm legal ground in making an employer collect taxes for the Treasury.

Accordingly, for the past year she has been battling the Treasury in various ways. For one thing, she has refused to withhold taxes from her employees' wage checks and to pay any withholding taxes to the Government. And she has gone to the trouble of making certain that all her employees have actually paid their income taxes directly to the Internal Revenue Bureau of the Treasury. Today, the Treasury slapped a lien on Miss Kellems for about $6,000. Can Snyder make it stick? Can he collect a penalty from Miss Kellems for failing to withhold taxes which in every single instance have already been paid?

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YUGOSLAVIA: We learn that the State Department is urging the Export-Import Bank to grant a $25 million loan to Yugoslavia. It is also reported that the International Bank is about to send a mission to that country to investigate an application for a loan to develop mineral resources. Marquis Childs, columnist, in the Washington Post on July 30 reported that Secretary of State Acheson wants to issue a license to the Belgrade Government for purchase of a steel rolling mill in the United States. Mr. Acheson's enthusiasm for the transfer of the rolling mill, however, is only matched by Secretary of Defense Johnson's stubborn opposition to sending anything to Tito-land. So, at present that controversy is deadlocked. But we have a feeling that more will be heard of this and other proposals to assist Tito's Government, particularly since that dictator has intensified his propaganda against the Cominform, and even (August 2) sought to stir up revolution in Albania and Bulgaria. There is, of course, a case for extending American help, just as there is a case for propping up any government threatened by the Red menace. However, versed as we are in the manifold lunar aspects of our foreign policy, we cannot think of a more gross inconsistency than the contrast between the Administration's attitude towards Yugoslavia and its attitude -- or, let us say, its pugilistic posture -- towards Spain.

The Export-Import Bank turned down an application for a loan to Spain; that country, it was said, is not a good credit risk. But Spain has a good record for meeting its financial obligations, and the Franco Government even paid the debts of its predecessor, the Republican Government. The bonds of the old Yugoslav Government, we note, are quoted at 8 on the New York bond market. However, it is the moral argument presented by Mr. Acheson which is most frequently emphasized. Spain, Acheson said, is a dictatorship, has no habeas corpus nor trial by jury; does not grant freedom for trade unions, nor freedom of religion. Well, if it could be proved that Yugoslavia enjoys a single one of these democratic benefits, it would be front-page news in any paper in the country. Will Acheson really try to prove that Dictator Tito is a less repulsive figure than Caudillo Franco? The next argument we shall doubtless hear will be the military argument. Well, Secretary Johnson's boys in the Pentagon answer that as follows: "Why give machinery to the Jugs who are way out on our far-flung line? Any day a Kremlin agent may bump off Tito, and then a pro-Soviet Government might roll our rolling mill over to Stalin's side. Isn't it better to secure our essential bridgehead in Europe-Spain? In any case Franco can't turn pro-Kremlin." It's a hard job to read the Acheson mind. But perhaps this is it: Since Tito is a Socialist, it may be that Acheson's real motive is ideological. But that hardly makes it logical. Some think that Franco is also a National Socialist and therefore, by Fair Deal standards, a "liberal".

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Book Events

A Mencken Chrestomathy. A selection of H. L. M.'s out-of-print writings, edited by himself. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. $5.00. Reviewed by Frank Chodorov.

Twenty years ago I burst out in a fan letter to H. L. Mencken. I was duly appreciative, I wrote, of his indictment of the current brand of civilization, but wished for something more. When did he intend to give us a solution? What was his formula for a Society free from the skullduggery he so brilliantly exposed -- his recipe for uadulterated progress? He graciously replied to the effect that therapeutics was not in his line, that he was only a diagnostician. I was disappointed, to say the least, for twenty years ago I was convinced that social perfection is a possibility simply because human perfectibility is a certainty; rationalism was under the obligation of discovering the socio-economic Truth which, if taken regularly three times a day, would make the world into what I presumed H. L. M. wanted it to be. His answer to my letter had the effect of losing for him a reader.

When I got hold of A Mencken Chrestomathy -- his own selection from his out-of-print writings -- and read again his delightful essays and chuckled over his biting sallies or epigrammatic paradoxes, it occurred to me that after all, and in spite of his claims to the contrary, Mencken always had the formula for what the romanticists call the "good Society". It is not the infallible blueprint the naive reformer always looks for, or the packaged law of revealed religion; nor is it related to the formulae called constructive, meaning doing something for the sake of doing. And yet, it is the only way by which life in a social integration can be improved.

This, then, is the formula that one picks up from his writings: Since Society is but an agglomeration of individuals, its character is only a reflection of theirs. Any improvement of Society is dependent upon betterment of its component parts. Whether or not all these parts are improvable is a moot question, and one is in no doubt where H. L. M. stands there. But that some have in different degrees the capacity for self-improvement is evident from the fact that a Mencken acquires a readership, and it is to these that a Mencken addresses himself. If one can help these to properly assess their environment, it is possible that the malignant institutions and false values that Society spawns may shrivel.

That this is the purpose -- the formula -- of H. L. M. can reasonably be inferred from this paragraph: "The iconoclast proves enough when he proves by his blasphemy that this or that idol is defectively convincing -- that at least one visitor to the shrine is left full of doubts. The liberation of the human mind has best been furthered by the gay fellows who heaved dead cats into sanctuaries and then went roistering down the highways of the world, proving to all men that doubt, after all, was safe -- that the god in the sanctuary was a fraud. One horse-laugh is worth ten thousand syllogisms."

That is to say, criticism is a good in itself. Voltaire, Swift, Matthew Arnold gave us no synthetic philosophy; Gilbert and Sullivan aspired to entertain only. Yet these men rendered inestimable value to their contemporaries by exposing the popular untruths, prejudices and hypocrisies scabbing the festering social sores. They improve upon the mores by retarding the tendency toward inbreeding. They offer as their formula for social improvement the only one that has basic merit: individual understanding and individual ideals. They peddle no patent medicines.

Despite the fact that, as a necessity of his trade, H. L. M. concentrated on the events and trends of his time, he will serve future generations, who will have replaced the absurdities he exposes with those of their own device, as a model of craftsmanship. We relish the art of Matthew Arnold today even though we are compelled to refer to footnotes for an understanding of his subject matter; so will the critical essayists of the future sharpen their pencils on A Mencken Chrestomathy.

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